

WESTLAND, MI
Mayor William R. Wild

Compassionate City Initiative

The City of Westland adopted its Compassionate City Initiative in March 2014 with the goal of promoting good will among citizens in a way that transcends race, religion, creed, and economic differences. The Compassionate Cities Movement was initiated by the Dalai Lama more than a decade ago with teachings that called on cities to become more inclusive, tolerant, and respectful of all humanity. Mayor Wild was invited to meet with the Dalai Lama on two separate occasions, in 2013 and again in 2016. Following that first “life changing” meeting with the Dalai Lama, Mayor Wild became the first mayor in the State of Michigan to sign the Charter for Compassion, which laid the foundation for his City’s Compassionate City Initiative.

Westland’s initiative was designed to be a simple approach to encourage residents to connect with one another, to join together to lend a helping hand when one is needed and, in so doing, to create a kinder, better place to live. It encouraged residents to take positive action, to volunteer talents and skills to pre-empt problems, reduce crime, protect the environment, and help those who cannot help themselves due to age or physical ability. One facet of the initiative is an invitation to residents to report to the City what they see as notable good deeds performed by residents, enabling the City to formally recognize those residents’ compassion. Encouraging public recognition of compassionate acts, officials believe, will result in greater support for the initiative.

The impact of the Westland initiative can be seen in a range of examples of actions taken and recognized. During the Flint, Michigan water crisis, the Wild administration saw an opportunity to provide aid. The Mayor’s Office announced a bottled water drive that reflected the spirit of the Compassionate City Initiative. The City partnered with the United Auto Workers local and with local civic organizations to collect water, and over the course of just a few months, residents came together and gathered more than 2,500 cases of bottled water, 800 gallons, that were delivered by volunteers to Flint.

In another City Hall initiative, a day-long “Challenge for Compassion” event was held at a local park, providing residents with an opportunity to participate in a fund-raising drive benefiting local charities and organizations.

The City uses social media and also relies on word of mouth to promote Compassionate City and encourage residents to effect change in their community through acts of kindness. The result, say officials, is a “brushfire of compassion” that has spread across the city in the form of residents’ good deeds. The best example of this, they say, may be that of Vic Barra, President of the Wayne Ford Civic League, who is known for his service to the community. When the City was contacted by an elderly resident in dire need of assistance in the form of a wheelchair ramp – she had been passed around by numerous home care assistance groups – Mr. Barra was asked if he could help. He first assessed Mrs. Cunningham’s residence and determined that a wheelchair lift was needed. Teaming up with the local Fire and Police Departments, he was able to secure the funds needed to purchase the equipment, reaching out to the owner of a local concrete company, Great Lakes Concrete. The installation of the equipment was performed by Mr. Barra himself.

Like Mr. Barra, many other residents have answered the call of their neighbors and have been recognized for their service. Brian Harrison and Nina Jones are good examples: Mr. Harrison has been recognized after offering his help to a young woman who wandered into his place of business. Learning that the woman was in an abusive

relationship with her boyfriend and in need of help, he convinced her to reach out to her parents. As a result, the young woman was able to reconnect with her parents and be welcomed back to a loving household.

Nina Jones is a local Post Office worker who was able to offer her assistance to an elderly woman who entered the Post Office with a package filled with money that she was trying to send overnight to New Mexico. After questioning her, Ms. Jones discovered that the woman had been threatened, along with her family, receiving over 20 phone calls a day. Ms. Jones connected the woman with the proper authorities so that she could file charges and seek protection.

The Mayor's Office recognizes that the success of the initiative cannot, and should not, be measured by the number of recognition certificates distributed, as every good deed may act as a ripple that builds into a wave of compassion. Countering a belief expressed by many that today's society is less concerned with compassion for others, the Compassionate City Initiative offers residents a chance to get to know and care about their neighbors once again. Mayor Wild's administration continues to work closely with community organizations to develop strategies and allocate resources to this effort.

Additional information is available from Mayor William R. Wild at mayor@cityofwestland.com, or 734-467-3200.